

By Kay Ryan

Surfaces serve
their own purposes,
strive to remain
constant (all lives
want that). There is
a skin, not just on
peaches but on oceans
(note the telltale
slough of foam on beaches).
Sometimes it's loose,
as in the case
of cats: you feel how a
second life slides
under it. Sometimes it
fits. Take glass.
Sometimes it outlasts
its underside. Take reefs.

The private lives of surfaces
are innocent, not devious.
Take the one-dimensional
belief of enamel in itself,
the furious autonomy
of luster (crush a pearl—
it's powder), the whole
curious seamless
of how we're each surrounded
and what it doesn't teach.

Kay Ryan, "Surfaces" from *Elephant Rocks: Poems*. Copyright © 1997 by Kay Ryan. Reprinted with the permission of Grove/Atlantic, Inc.

Source: *Elephant Rocks* (Grove/Atlantic Inc., 1997)